



V.J. ST. PIERRE, JR.  
PARISH PRESIDENT

MICHAEL J. ALBERT, AICP  
PLANNING DIRECTOR

# ST. CHARLES PARISH

## DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING

14996 RIVER ROAD • P.O. BOX 302, HAHNVILLE, LOUISIANA 70057

(985) 783-5060 • Fax: (985) 783-6447

Website: [www.stcharlesparish-la.gov](http://www.stcharlesparish-la.gov)

**TO:** V.J. St. Pierre, Jr., Parish President

**FROM:** Michael Albert, AICP, Director of Planning and Zoning *MTA*

**SUBJECT:** 2014 Annual Report

The Department of Planning & Zoning is the agency responsible for administering the regulation of present land uses, planning future land uses, and for the issuance of building permits and activity permits within St. Charles Parish. The Department also oversees and assists the Planning & Zoning Commission, the Zoning Board of Adjustments and the Coastal Zone Advisory Committee, all of which are public bodies charged with administering land use regulation beyond the Departmental scope. Because the responsibilities are varied, the Department is divided into four sections in order to provide specialized services to the citizenry.

**Land Use Planning & Zoning** manages land use applications for residential and commercial development, reviews and recommends amendments to the Subdivision and Zoning Ordinance regulations. This section supports both the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Zoning Board of Adjustment by writing staff reports and testifying at public hearings.

**Permit Administration** is responsible for reviewing applications and issuing construction and permits. Construction permits include requests for new construction, additions to existing structures, accessory structures, mobile homes, and swimming pools. Other permits include requests for home occupations, taxi services, signs, change of use, and change of occupancy. The permitting section also requires compliance with the state and local construction codes. There were nearly as many building permits processed as in 2013 but an increase in the number of residential additions, and for multi-family residential structures, the first of these in the previous 5 years.

**Code Enforcement** enforces the zoning code, grass ordinance, trash and debris ordinance and abatement of unsafe structures. This includes the identification of violations, response to complaints and permit inspection. Code Inspectors responded to more requests for in-field inspections of building activity due to the increase of building permits for home construction as well as for changes of use for commercial development. There were also more complaints received than in 2013, but a greater success rate in the number of those resolved.

**Coastal Zone Management (CZM)** monitors and coastal and wetland activities and floodplain management through wetland permit review, wetland mitigation, project administration and wetland and floodplain code enforcement. CZM also continues to be the first point of contact for many citizens with questions and concerns about the impacts to home affordability as a result of passage of the Biggert-Waters Act by the U.S. Congress. Coastal Zone Management also continued the Christmas trees collection program for land building, oversaw shoreline protection projects, and continued improvements to Wetland Watcher's Park and the Bonne Carre Boat Launch.

As the new Director for the Department, it is my intention to continue the general direction and progress that we have made in our various divisions while opening up new training options for staff to ensure we are serving development in the Parish responsibly. We have begun the process of hiring key positions that will better serve the Parish's citizens in navigating the development process, all of which will better prepare the department for expected increases in permitting activity as the economy continues to improve.

2014 saw continued implementation of the Parish's planning and quality of life efforts through application of the adopted Comprehensive Plan. The Paul Maillard Revitalization Plan is one such extension of those long range goals that was adopted and approved this year. Further, under my direction we have begun the process of updating the Zoning Ordinance in partnership with UNO.

Permitting activity is up for the second straight year reflecting continued growth and improvement in the economy. Our Code Enforcement section shows similar numbers of complaints and complaint resolutions from 2013, yet far fewer cases being sent to our Legal department for review. This demonstrates the effectiveness of our Code Enforcement Officers in their ability to achieve compliance in a service oriented manner.

The Department of Planning and Zoning has the challenging task of maintaining the Parish's Zoning Ordinance and at the same time ensuring that property owners are able to enjoy their land as they see fit. The staff routinely and consistently demonstrates a high level of service to our citizens while bringing knowledgeable assistance and professional capacity to our partners in the development community. Maintaining these ideals is our primary goal for 2015.

Accompanying this memo is a copy of the 2014 Annual Report for the Department of Planning & Zoning. The report covers the following major functions of the Department:

- I. Land Use Planning
  - A. Code Revisions
  - B. Zoning District Changes
  - C. Subdivision Activity
- II. Permitting
  - A. Permits Issued
  - B. Variance Requests
- III. Code Enforcement Activity
- IV. Coastal Zone Management
- V. Other Projects

## **I. LAND USE PLANNING**

As outlined in the Home Rule Charter the Department of Planning & Zoning is the regulatory agency responsible for all land use planning within St. Charles Parish. Departmental staff, the Planning & Zoning Commission, the Zoning Board of Adjustments and the Coastal Zone Advisory Committee in accordance with the Code of Ordinances, administers land use regulation.

**A. 2014 Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulation Revisions:** Land use regulations are continually evaluated to meet the needs of St. Charles Parish. In 2014, the following amendments to the Code of Ordinance was evaluated by the Department and approved by the St. Charles Parish Council:

- Ordinance 14-1-12: To amend the Code of Ordinances Appendix C, St Charles Parish Subdivision Ordinance of 1981, to add requirements to the minor and major subdivision procedures to ensure consistency with proposed Code of Ordinance Chapter 25, Storm Water Management and Erosion and Sedimentation Control which regulates non-storm water discharges to the Parish Municipal Separate Storm Water Sewer System (MS4) consistent with state and federal requirements.
- Ordinance 14-3-5: To amend the St. Charles Parish Code of Ordinances, Appendix C, Subdivision Regulations, Section II. Subdivision procedure, H. Acceptance of Improvements by revising I. Procedure and 2. Maintenance Agreement/Surety Bond.
- Ordinance 14-4-8: To revise the Code of Ordinances, Appendix A, Section VI.E. Batture Districts by adding the B-2(M) (Moderate Industrial Batture) Zoning District.
- Ordinance 14-8-3: To ordinance to amend the St. Charles Parish Code of Ordinances, Appendix C. Subdivision Regulations, Section II, Subdivision Procedure, C. Minor Resubdivision, 1, to require approval of minor subdivisions by the Parish Council.
- Ordinance 14-8-5: To modify permit fees, Chapter 6, Article 2, Section 6-15. Fees.
- Ordinance 14-8-6: To amend the Code of Ordinances, Appendix A, Sec. VI.C.[IV.] C-3., 1.c.Special permit uses to provide that approval of special permits for barrooms, night clubs, lounges and dancehalls shall require a supporting resolution of the Council.
- Ordinance 14-8-7 to amend the Code of Ordinances, Appendix A, Sec. VI.B.[IV.] R-1M.2.a. to provide that RV Parks shall require a supporting resolution of the Council.
- Ordinance 14-8-8: To amend the Code of Ordinances, Appendix A, Sec. VI.D.[I.] M-1., 1.c.(5) and Section VI.D.[I.] M-1.1.c(7) to provide that approval of special use permits for tow yards, barrooms night clubs, lounges, and dancehalls shall require a supporting resolution of Council.

**B. 2014 Zoning District Changes:** In addition to revising the text of the Subdivision Regulations and Zoning Ordinance, the Department also processes rezoning requests which result in Zoning Map amendments. After Departmental review, these requests are forwarded to the Planning Commission for a recommendation. Afterwards, the case is forwarded to the Council for final vote to approve or deny. Rezoning cases are forwarded to the Council because rezoning is a change to the Zoning Map and thus is an amendment to the Ordinance. Amendments to the Ordinance can only be made if there is a majority Council vote. In 2014, the Department processed 19 requests for rezoning of property. One case was removed from consideration before public hearing of the Planning & Zoning Commission.

**2014 Rezoning Cases, and 5-Year Comparison**

| Year        | Applications Submitted | P&Z Commission Recommendations |          | Parish Council Decisions |          |
|-------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|
|             |                        | Approval                       | Denial   | Approved                 | Denied   |
| <b>2014</b> | <b>19</b>              | <b>14</b>                      | <b>4</b> | <b>14</b>                | <b>4</b> |
| 2013        | 25                     | 14                             | 4        | 16                       | 3        |
| 2012        | 14                     | 12                             | 2        | 12                       | 1        |
| 2011        | 11                     | 8                              | 3        | 8                        | 2        |
| 2010        | 17                     | 7                              | 8        | 7                        | 7        |

**C. 2014 Subdivision Activity:** The Department is responsible for administering all residential and commercial land partitions within St. Charles Parish in accordance with the procedures and design standards of the Subdivision Ordinance. Per the Comprehensive Land Use Plan the Parish has approximately 1,200 vacant platted residential lots in the parish that could be developed in the future. For the past several years, nearly all resubdivision activity has involved some of these lots.

Minor Subdivisions/Administrative Resubdivisions: The majority of applications received by the Department for land partitions result in five or fewer lots and do not require requiring infrastructure improvements. Subdivision Regulations specifies two procedures for completing these Minor Resubdivisions. The first procedure entails a minor subdivision resulting in a net increase of lots. These require Planning and Zoning Commission approval and Parish President's signature before filing with the Clerk of Court. The Department refers to these as "*minor subdivisions*."

*Administrative* minor subdivisions do not result in a net increase of lots but creates the same number of or few lots than what originated. These requests typically result in minor adjustments of existing lot lines or result in a net reduction in the number of lots. They do not require public hearing before the Commission; only the signatures from the Planning & Zoning Director and the Parish President before Clerk of Court filing.

### Minor Resubdivisions

| Resubdivision  | Applications Processed | Lots Created or Modified |
|----------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Minor          | 17                     | 42                       |
| Administrative | 39                     | 64                       |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>56</b>              | <b>106</b>               |

One administrative resubdivision was never completed. Two of the applications indicated in the table were for Acts of Correction and Acts of Donation.

**Major Subdivisions:** Major subdivisions are resubdivision actions that result in the creation of more than five (5) lots, and / or contain a proposed street, and / or require infrastructure improvements. If infrastructure is required, the action is processed through a formal process consisting of three major steps: Preliminary Plat, Construction Approval, and Final Approval/Dedication of Infrastructure. If approved by the Council, the subdivision plat is filed with the Clerk of Court. The developer is then authorized to sell lots.

No cases for new major subdivisions were presented in 2014. There were there no requests for Preliminary Plats or Construction Approval, nor requests for Final Approval.

## **II. PERMITTING**

**A. Permits issued:** As outlined in the Home Rule Charter, the Department of Planning & Zoning is the regulatory agency responsible for the issuance of building permits and activity permits within St. Charles Parish. In 2014, there was a slight decrease in total permits by activity with two exceptions: permits for residential additions and those for multi-family. The latter activity reversed a 5-year trend in which no permit applications were submitted.

### 2013 Select Permit Activity and Five Year Comparison

| Permit Type     | 2014<br>Total | 2013<br>Total | 2012<br>Total | 2011<br>Total | 2010<br>Total | 2009<br>Total |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| New Residential | 112           | 115           | 98            | 67            | 57            | 108           |
| Additions       | 158           | 152           | 163           | 145           | 117           | 133           |
| Mobile Homes    | 44            | 60            | 61            | 58            | 50            | 64            |
| Commercial      | 20            | 28            | 51            | 45            | 40            | 14            |
| Industrial      | 0             | 0             | 1             | 2             | 1             | 2             |
| Religious       | 1             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 2             | 0             |
| Multi-Family    | 7             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             |
| Medical         | 0             | 4             | 1             | 2             | 1             | 0             |
| Educational     | 1             | 0             | 4             | 5             | 5             | 3             |
| Swimming Pools  | 38            | 44            | 35            | 38            | 31            | 36            |
| Change of Use   | 85            | 107           | 97            | 127           | 82            | 112           |
| <b>Totals</b>   | <b>466</b>    | <b>510</b>    | <b>510</b>    | <b>483</b>    | <b>386</b>    | <b>472</b>    |

There were also 11 permits for *signs*, 20 permits for *Certificates of Public Necessity and Convenience (taxicabs)*, 65 *residential renovations*, 26 *demolition permits*, and 4 *government building permits*.

**B. Variance Requests:** The St. Charles Parish Code of Ordinances states that approval or denial of any permit application shall be based on the compliance with all pertinent regulations. Occasionally, an irregularity with the property adversely affects its development. When strict application of the regulations would result in any such unnecessary hardship, the Code stipulates that the property owner may request relief from the Zoning Board of Adjustments (ZBA). The ZBA holds regularly scheduled public meetings to review such requests and decides each case with a majority vote. In 2014 the ZBA considered 33 individual applications requesting variances from the following Code requirements:

**2014 Variance Requests Presented to the ZBA**

| <b>Regulations To:</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>Approved</b> | <b>Denied</b> |
|------------------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Setbacks-Front Yard    | 12           | 10              | 2             |
| Setbacks-Rear Yard     | 9            | 9               | 0             |
| Setbacks-Side Yard     | 7            | 7               | 0             |
| Base Flood Elevation   | 7            | 6               | 0*            |
| Parking                | 2            | 2               | 0             |
| Buffer Zone            | 1            | 1               | 0             |
| Fence                  | 1            | 1               | 0             |
| Minimum Lot Area       | 1            | 1               | 0             |
| Expand Non-conformity  | 1            | 1               | 0             |

\*One case withdrawn.

### **III. CODE ENFORCEMENT**

The Department of Planning & Zoning is tasked with enforcing a number of sections of the Parish Code of Ordinances. In order to increase both effectiveness and efficiency within the code enforcement sector of the Department, a geographical district is assigned to each Code Enforcement Officer who responds to all activity within that area. Code Enforcement Officers investigate general nuisance complaints ranging from grass to abandoned automobile concerns and violations. They monitor residential and commercial construction, additions and swimming pool installations as mandated in the Code. Specific activities are detailed in the chart below.

**2014 Code Enforcement Activity**

|                                                     |      |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------|
| <b>Permits Inspected and Finaled</b>                | 354  |
| <b>Permits Pending or Unresolved as of 12/31/14</b> | 42   |
| <b>Total Complaints Received</b>                    | 1143 |
| <b>Total Complaints Resolved</b>                    | 654  |
| <b>Derelict vehicles tagged or removed</b>          | 55   |
| <b>Illegal signs removed</b>                        | 1326 |
| <b>Cases In Legal, as of 12/31/14</b>               | 22   |

It should be noted that the total number of *Permits* and *Complaints* responded to in 2014 are much lower than in previous years due to how the data was recorded and reported by the Code Enforcement Inspectors beginning in 2014. In previous years, they reported the ***number of trips*** made by the Inspectors to sites, **not** the number of cases that they monitored or responded to. Most, if not all cases require more than a single on-site visit to monitor progress or code compliance; so the totals reported in previous years are much higher than what is indicated in the table above for 2014. After feedback from the Code Enforcement Inspectors and improvement in the management of the Department's database, it became possible to count the number of case files the Code Enforcement Inspectors responded instead of what was being reported in the past and is actually a better reflection of what the Section seeks to accomplish.

With regards to *Derelict Vehicles*, *Illegal Signs Removed*, or *Cases Forwarded to Legal*, the reporting methods have remained the same with each incident representing a unique case or instance of activity. The end result is that all category totals in the Code Enforcement Activity table use the same reporting methodology. A final point: any differential between the Total Number of Permits Issued and Total Number of Permits may be due to the fact that some permit cases either remained unresolved or did not require an inspection.

#### **IV. COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT**

In 2014, the Coastal Zone Management Section assisted, coordinated, managed or oversaw the projects and programs indicated below.

##### Christmas Tree Collection Project:

The Coastal Zone Management Section completed the 2013/2014 Christmas Tree Project in the Simoneaux Pond Area in Bayou Gauche Area. Approximately 2,400 Christmas Trees were collected and placed in the open water to serve as a wave breaker, and to build land. The trees were placed in the additional pens that were built in 2010's project. The project was completed in April 2014 by Coast Environments Inc. The 2014/2015 Project will required that additional pens be constructed. Bids were received for the 2014/2015 project and the award went to Bayou Boat Rentals of Des Allemands. St. Charles Parish has continued the Christmas Tree projects despite the State's abandonment of the program.

##### Coastal Impact Assessment Program (CIAP):

The Lake Pontchartrain Shoreline Protection Project continued this year with the completion of design, engineering and permitting work for the East LaBranche Shoreline through Moffat and Nichols, with the Pontchartrain Levee District. The East LaBranche Project also received an additional 2 million dollars from CPRA in the form of state CIAP money. This brings the total budget to 3.7 million and will allow to protection to extend to Pipeline Canal. The bid opening for East LaBranche is scheduled for January 20, 2014. The CZM Section through volunteers coordinated by Milton Cambre planted the spoil bank behind the West LaBranche Shoreline Project and the shoreline behind it

##### Wetland Watchers' Park:

During 2014, the parish began construction of a storage facility at WWP, sponsored by donations from Entergy. The storage shed will house all of the material used by the school



children during their field days at the park. The shed, also called the Tree House, is 12 feet off the ground to avoid flood waters, has a retractable stair for security, has its pilings designed to look like cypress trees and is to be powered by solar panels. The project should be complete in early 2015.

Digital Flood Insurance Rate (DFIRM) Maps:

After all of the changes to flood insurance law in 2013 and 2014, the Floodplain Management Section felt it necessary to do some public education. We sponsored a series of 4 public meeting, no less than 6 club and organization meetings and a parish wide mail out to help keep our citizens up to date with the new changes. We acknowledge that the new laws will bring higher premiums to everyone with flood insurance nationwide, but are more reasonable than the original Biggert-Waters changes. We will continue to update as new premiums are posted. In addition to the Public Education, the FM section is also an active part of the LAMP (Levee Assessment Mapping Program), which should more accurately reflect the flood risk here in the Parish. The program should last until mid-2016.

## **V. OTHER PROJECTS**

In addition to the regulated responsibilities the Department of Planning & Zoning collaborates with all departments of parish government as we work together to improve life in St. Charles Parish.

**Paul Maillard Road Corridor Revitalization Plan**

2014 saw the adoption and approval of the Paul Maillard Road Revitalization Plan. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the plan November 6<sup>th</sup> to adopt the plan and subsequently the Parish Council held a public hearing and approved the plan on December 1<sup>st</sup>.

The Paul Maillard Road Revitalization Plan is an extension of the Parish's 2030 Comprehensive Plan. Funded under a Sustainable Communities Challenge Grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development in the amount of \$442,422, the project was conducted under consulting partnership with Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc.

An 18-seat committee led by stakeholders helped develop and guide the plan over the course of its two year evolution. Property owners, business leaders, and community advocates from the corridor expressed near unanimous support of the plan which will help provide a blueprint for the funding of projects, implementation of modern design standards, and redevelopment guidance for years to come.

Development of a design overlay zone is planned for 2015 and will be the first step towards implementation of the plan.

**South Central Regional Construction Code Council**

In conjunction Building Code Plan Review and Inspection contract with South Central Regional Planning, the Planning Department represents St. Charles Parish on this Board which is comprised of all Parishes represented by South Central Planning for compliance with Louisiana State Uniform Construction Codes. This board meets quarterly to discuss any issues that arise regarding compliance with construction codes.

### **Geographic Information System (GIS)**

Database building of address points layer (address points for residential and commercial buildings within the Parish) continued in 2014. This project started in 2010 and as a result, a vast majority of structures within the parish, and all parish-owned parks, sewer lift stations, and pump stations, have addresses that can be easily geo-referenced by the Planning & Zoning staff and provided to the public. GIS has become an invaluable tool for Planning & Zoning staff as it provides quicker, easier, and more efficient ways to assist those seeking our assistance. Once the large-scale address issuance task was accomplished, attention then focused on adding new addresses for vacant sites being permitted for development as permit applications were submitted to the Permit section. In some of these cases, the addresses on record needed correcting and staff had no verifiable way of even knowing the current address was erroneous without the applicant calling attention to it. Also, the Office of the Assessor began forwarding information about vacant, unaddressed parcels to Planning Staff for addressing. This particular aspect of the project should ongoing for the next several years. The Department continues to update and correct the zoning layer and has also begun work on the Future Land Use Map layer of the Parish's GIS database. The 2014 rezonings are also reflected on the GIS zoning layer and staff have begun maintaining a list of zoning and Future Land Use designations that are in need of review during the five-year (2016) Future Land Use Map revision.

### **Taxicabs (CPNCs)**

Ordinance 13-6-7 aligned St. Charles Parish's standards for a Certificate of Public Necessity and Convenience (CPNC/taxicab permit) with the standards at Louis Armstrong International Airport. As the result of the stricter standard at the airport and in the City of New Orleans, requests for taxicab certificates (Certificates of Public Necessity and Convenience) increased over 700%; requests for information regarding the Parish's taxicab standard and permitting process increased immeasurably.

An April 14, 2014 memo from the Planning Director states that the Parish's public necessity and convenience can be met by 20 CPNCs and therefore, the number of CPNCs issued in St. Charles Parish is capped at 20. The Department processed 22 applications for CPNCs in 2014 (\$1,100); 19 CPNCs were issued; 3 applications could not be completed. Twelve CPNC holders completed the annual renewal in 2014 (\$300). The remaining seven (7) CPNC holders have until January 31, 2015 to complete the renewal process. The Department took one complaint from the public regarding a St. Charles Parish taxicab in 2014.

In addition to working with the St. Charles Parish Sheriff (who issues drivers' permits and enforces most sections of the taxicab ordinance), staff have developed working relationships with the New Orleans Taxicab Bureau, the Transportation Division of Louis Armstrong International Airport, Tropical Brake Tag and John Starr Auto Care inspection stations, Taxicab Insurance Store, Abe and Ellis Meters, and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures, to administer the taxicab ordinance such that a high standard for St. Charles Parish Taxicabs is maintained.